CHAPTER SIX

BAIT FISHING

Techniques and traces

Bait Fishing involves the use of natural marine organisms as bait and is the most commonly employed angling technique on our coastline. Location and target species will determine the type of trace and tactics to use when fishing natural baits. I have covered enough basic traces to get you started wherever you may be fishing. As you progress you will tweak these to suit your angling style, but bear in mind that these rigs have proved themselves on the South African coast over many years, so stick to the basic principles behind them.

Hook sizes and strength of snoods will depend on species targeted. As a guide I have given the sizes and line strengths that will work for a wide spread of species in the majority of situations. I have also included the knots most suitable for use with the traces discussed. Sinker weights will vary with the outfit you are using so I have not specified these.

All Purpose Estuary Trace

Used with the ultra-light or light outfit this trace is ideal for most estuarine species, particularly spotted grunter. It incorporates a suitably-sized ball or barrel sinker that slides freely up the line and causes minimal resistance when a fish picks the bait up. Hook sizes from no. 8 to 1/0 are normally
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used. The hook snood should be about 60cm long and as light as practicable, normally around 4kg to 6kg breaking strain unless bigger fish are expected. Tucked blood and figure eight knots work best with this trace.

Christmas Tree Trace

A Christmas tree trace enables you to present two or more hooks on the same trace. It’s used on the ultra-light or light outfit for small bait species such as karanteen. No.10 hooks, small three-way swivels, tear drop sinkers and snoods of 4kg breaking strain nylon are recommended. Tucked blood or figure eight knots are suitable for this trace.
**All-purpose Gully Trace**

Fishing white water gullies with the light outfit is a popular and effective method for species such as galjoen, blacktail and stonebream. Use hooks ranging from no.4 to 2/0 tied to a hook snood of 5kg to 10kg breaking strain nylon. A light tear drop sinker works best with this rig because you don’t want to anchor the bait – it needs to move about a little with the current. The sinker snood should be slightly shorter than the hook snood and must be of nylon substantially lighter in breaking strain. This will ensure that should the sinker become jammed in the rocks you will not lose the whole trace, only the sinker. Hook and sinker snood are tied to a three-way swivel using tucked blood or figure eight knots.

**Shad (Elf) Traces**

It is very likely that any newcomer to shore angling is going to start on the common and popular shad. The traces discussed can be used on either the light or medium outfit but the light outfit will give the best results. Traces for shad differ slightly from other targets so they need to be looked at in some detail.
First you will need to make up some wire traces because shad have razor sharp teeth.

**Basic Shad Trace**

Piano wire in sizes no.6 or no.7 should be used; nylon coated wire is not suitable because it kinks easily. Hooks from 2/0 to 4/0 are best. A basic shad trace is simply a hook joined to a small swivel by about 12 cm of wire using the haywire twist. This is then attached to a bottom, floating or drift trace.

**Shad Bottom Trace**

Shad bottom traces incorporate a small float above the hook to lift the bait off the bottom and attract the fish’s attention. This float is threaded on to the hook snood and then either
held in place just above the wire trace with a plastic plug or forced over the swivel above the hook so that it stays in place. The hook snood is generally longer than the sinker snood; both are attached to a medium three-way swivel. Tucked blood or figure eight knots are used. Cone or pyramid sinkers are popular with shad anglers.

**Shad Float Trace**

A shad float trace uses a float to suspend the bait above the bottom and as a bite indicator. It also gives the bait an attractive motion and allows you to cover a lot of water when searching out fish. This trace is deadly on the light outfit for shad in sheltered waters like bays where there is not a great deal of wave action. For this trace a float large enough to suspend the bait and a small running sinker are threaded up the line. The hook trace is then attached with a tucked blood or figure eight knot. The ball sinker slides down to the hook and keeps the bait down at the fish’s level while the float suspends the rig above the bottom. Adjust the depth of the trace according to the depth of water being fished. Ideally the bait should be about 30cm off the bottom.
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Shad Drift Trace

Shad drift traces comprise a small running sinker threaded onto the line above the hook trace. The sinker adds weight for casting and keeps the bait in mid-water when being retrieved slowly.

All Purpose Bottom Trace for Sandy Areas

Breakaway sinker with wire
The all purpose bottom trace for sandy areas is the workhorse rig of the rock and surf angler. Suitable for all outfits, use it when the bottom is sandy for a wide variety of species from stumpnose to stingrays. Hook sizes 2/0 to 6/0, medium three-way swivel, breakaway sinker with wires and hook snoods from 12.5kg to 21kg breaking strain will suffice for the majority of situations. Tucked blood or figure eight knots are best for this trace.

**All Purpose Bottom Trace for Rocky Areas**

![Trace Diagram]

Used on light, medium or heavy outfits the all-purpose bottom trace for rocky areas is suitable for fishing for all reef dwelling species in rocky areas where the trace is likely to become snagged. It is similar to the sandy bottom trace but the sinker snood should be made of lighter nylon than the hook snood so that it can be parted without the loss of the whole trace (and fish!) should the sinker get jammed in the rocks. A nylon grappling sinker is recommended. Hook
sizes 2/0 to 6/0, medium three-way swivel, hook snood of 16kg to 21kg breaking strain and sinker snood of 12.5kg breaking strain are ideal unless you intend to target species like musselcracker in which case you may want to use heavier nylon to the hook. Tucked blood or figure eight knots are suitable for this trace.

**Basic Live Bait Trace**

Live baiting is an effective method when fishing for predators such as garrick. Both the medium and heavy outfits are suitable for this application. When using live baits a running trace is employed. The idea behind this is that the fish picks up the bait but doesn’t feel the weight of the sinker and is not frightened into dropping the bait which may happen if a fixed sinker is employed. With the live bait trace the sinker snood is tied to a two-way swivel the free end of which is threaded up the main line.

Depending on the size of the bait one or two hooks are used. These are joined to a two-way swivel with a suitably strong hook snood; 23kg breaking strain will be adequate for most situations. The hook snood is then attached to the main line. The swivel attaching the sinker should be able to slide up the line unimpeded when the fish picks the bait up. Keep the sinker just above the bait to make casting easier. Use tucked blood or figure eight knots with this trace.
Small Shark Traces

Small shark traces feature a length of nylon or carbon coated wire above the hook to prevent bite offs from the fishes sharp teeth. Attach the hook to the wire with a figure eight knot and the wire to the nylon with a double figure eight knot. Shark traces can be used on either of the foregoing all-purpose traces with the light, medium or heavy outfit. Hook sizes 6/0 to 8/0 tied to 30kg to 45kg breaking strain nylon or carbon-coated wire with 25kg to 40kg nylon between wire and swivel are adequate for small greys, bronze whalers, raggies and hammerheads. Bigger sharks such as Zambezis, big greys, blackfin and large raggies require more specialized traces and tactics. In the early stages of your angling career it’s a good idea to get some experience with smaller sharks before tangling with the submarines.

Big Shark Traces

Although fishing for very big fish with heavy tackle is a rather specialized field I have included some basic information for those of you who see your angling heading in this direction. Using a non-return slide on heavy tackle is the best way for newcomers to big fish angling to get a large bait a good distance out to sea. In traditional bait angling the sinker and bait are cast from the reel. It is very difficult to cast a big bait a long way like this, so the slide was invented to overcome the problem. When using the slide the sinker is cast as far as possible then the bait is clipped to the line and slid down to
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the sinker. This is accomplished by shaking the rod rapidly backwards and forwards. The slide is designed to move down the line but cannot travel back up it so each shake of the rod takes the bait further down the line until it reaches the sinker.

When using sliding baits you are targeting very big fish so a heavy outfit and nylon no lighter than 0.55mm diameter should be used. Slide traces usually employ two 8/0 or 10/0 hooks tied onto 50kg to 100kg nylon or carbon coated wire then on to a swivel attached to the non-return slide. Figure eight knots are used here. The sinker component of the trace comprises a breakaway wire sinker in weights ranging from 8oz to 100z attached to a ring or stopper and swivel. A short length of nylon joins the sinker to the stopper ring and the leader is tied to the swivel. This stopper keeps the slide trace away from the sinker when the bait has travelled right down the line.

Once the sinker has been cast and allowed to settle enough to provide a solid anchor point the slide and bait are clipped to the line and the angler shakes the rod until the bait arrives at the sinker. It is a fairly simple technique but factors like currents, type of area fished, and the size of the quarry complicate matters so some experience is needed before the beginner starts sliding baits.

**Individual Components for Big Shark Trace**

![Diagram of Individual Components for Big Shark Trace]

A. Non-return clip

- 50cm-70cm
- 50kg-100kg b/s nylon or carbon coated wire

B. Swivel + stopper ring

- 30cm nylon
- Heavy breakaway sinker

Hooks 8/0 or 10/0
Assembled Big Shark Trace

To reel
Non-return clip

50cm-70cm
50kg-100kg b/s nylon
or carbon coated wire

Hooks
8/0 or 10/0

Swivel + stopper ring

30cm nylon

Heavy breakaway sinker

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